

be held until the following year. Therefore, Wilmington's political elite staged a coup d'état to retake the city's offices. Citing ineffectual leadership, corrupt officials, and soaring crime, the men justified their actions as for the greater good of Wilmington society. In articles and cartoons circulated throughout the city and state prior to elections, the perceived ineffectiveness of Wilmington's mayor and Board of Aldermen was consistently conspicuous, thus paving the way for the afternoon takeover.¹²¹

Assured of success, as soon as the first shots were fired, Rountree, a primary facilitator of the coup, began to work to ensure that the amendment to the White Declaration of Independence calling for the resignation of the mayor would be fulfilled. Although not specifically stated in the version of the Declaration passed at the meeting on Wednesday, Rountree and others also hoped that the other members of the Board of Aldermen would follow suit if opposition was strong enough.¹²²

Determined to become a driving force in the coup, Rountree spoke with

businessman W. H. Chadbourn at the post office during the early stages of the riot. Chadbourn promised to induce the current mayor and board to resign if the businessmen would select a new slate of officials.¹²³ Afterwards, while in Brooklyn witnessing the early rioting near Fourth and Harnett, Rountree found Iredell Meares and informed him of the proposal that Chadbourn had put forth. Meares, a member of Waddell's Committee of Twenty-Five, agreed with the plan. Rountree sought out Chadbourn again so that the current members of the city's government could be called for a meeting. Rountree then went to the Cape Fear Club to mull over his next step. While at the club, Rountree was asked by another member of the committee, Charles Worth, to attend a meeting of Waddell's Committee of Twenty-Five at the Seaboard Air Line Building to present Chadbourn's offer to the committee. At the meeting, Rountree informed the committee that he could promise the resignations of the mayor and Board of Aldermen if they would select a replacement mayor and board.¹²⁴

In addition to the machinations of Chadbourn and Rountree, another man, Daniel Gore, a member of the sitting Board of Aldermen, contacted the newly elected U. S. representative John D. Bellamy. Gore told Bellamy that he could influence the mayor and aldermen to resign if Bellamy could contact the "gentlemen in charge of matters in Wilmington" and suggest that they select property owners and men of intelligence to serve on the board. Bellamy also attended the early afternoon meeting of Waddell's committee at the railroad offices to present

¹²¹ In 1997, the Research Branch of the Office of Archives and History investigated the claims of corruption, economic downturns, and increased crime. The researchers did not find support for any of these claims. Their findings can be found in Appendix I. For more information on Governor Russell's precarious situation and Democratic propaganda disparaging Wilmington's Republican mayor and Board of Aldermen, see Chapters Three and Four.

¹²² During the discussions regarding the amendment to the White Declaration of Independence, former mayor Fishplate had called for the city leaders to resign in more direct language. However, attorneys such as Rountree and Hugh MacRae sought to soften the language and call for the mayor and chief of police to resign instead. At the meeting, Rountree had answered businessman Nathaniel Jacobi that the issue of the resignations of the other members of the Board of Aldermen "would be attended to." Rountree, "Memorandum," *Wilmington Messenger*, November 10, 1898.

¹²³ Rountree, "Memorandum," *Evening Dispatch* (Wilmington), November 10, 1898.

¹²⁴ Rountree, "Memorandum," *Evening Dispatch* (Wilmington), November 10, 1898.